

Rural Opportunities Campaign - Kilkenny Friday, March 22, 2019.
Thomastown Concert Hall, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny.

Two representatives from the Wexford PPN secretariat attended at this event which promoted the Rural and Community sub – set of the Government of Ireland's Project Ireland 2040. This is the Government's overarching policy initiative to make Ireland a better country for all of us.

It was attended by Ministers Michael Ring, TD, Charlie Flanagan, TD and Richard Bruton, TD and Minister of State John Paul Phelan, TD and their officials, the Chair of Kilkenny Co. Co., and County Councillors and officials and volunteers from the community, environmental, and social inclusion sectors and PPN reps.

The Secretary General of the Department of Rural and Community Development advised that this event was one of a series of roadshows to outline assistance under the Project 2040 and how community groups can access it.

Minister Ring advised that the Plan provides crucial grant aid to groups and in addressing the complexity of the grant application process he proposes to provide support to groups through workshops provided by Pobal to assist with applying for grant aid.

He showed a video of a number of community and other initiatives which benefitted from capital, employment and LEO grants and funding. Some of these were:

Carlow Hydraulics,
Mens' Sheds,
Hook Head
and Engage, an artists studio at Garvey's Yard, Longford.

He also outlined numerous major initiatives underway within the region, including the Johnstown Castle re-development and the Trinity Wharf, Wexford development.

The Action Plan is designed to enable people to live, work and raise their families in the rural environment. He stressed the importance of volunteering within the State. He acknowledged that so much work would not be done locally without the input and work of the Community sectors and Volunteers.

The other Ministers welcomed the funding and had lent their full support at Cabinet level to the proposals.

Minister Bruton outlined many of the employment supports available such as LEO and spoke of school clusters, subsidiarity, the Clár programme and the matter of sustainability and energy. In relation to Clár funding the matter of the requirement for schools to be accessible for 52 weeks to the community in the year was noted.

Minister Flanagan spoke of a number of initiatives in his Department including "Thor", the allocation of experienced Gardai for community policing, the extension of CCTV and the Garda text alert system.

In respect of insurance, which affects all community groups, he outlined proposals in respect of quantum and databases but noting the commercial nature of insurance companies.

Four organisations then gave an outline of their work and the importance of grant aid in them achieving their goals. These were:

Nemeton TV, Ring, Co. Waterford, has a work force of over 60 and benefited from a number of grants and funding, training and mentoring from among others, Udaras na Gaeltachta. It noted that being rurally based was not an impediment to its growth and expansion.

The Japanese gardens in the centre of Tramore started as a tribute to an Irish writer famous in Japan, Patrick Lafcadio Hearn, who was half Irish and half Greek. It is a 2.5 acre garden which is a major tourist attraction and benefits from C.E. schemes, Tourism grants and the support of CSP funding. It uses volunteer work for matching funds.

The Villierstown, Co. Waterford Education & Culture Project is an community based organization which develops education, arts and culture in the village. It obtained Leader funding and provides early years education, created a boat club on the Blackwater and provides Eco Tours and walking trails in the area.

Clontubrid National school in Co.Kikenny availed of the Clar funding to provide an all weather sports pitch. This pitch required major re-development and is usable all year around. The speaker highlighted the importance of sport in improving mental health.

Other groups outlined their activities:

The Graiguenamanagh boat rally and book festivals activities were outlined as well as its Iron man challenge.

The Thomastown Community River Trust develops and improves the community recreation and leisure amenity of the River Nore in the vicinity of Thomastown.

In a wide ranging discussion the challenges facing groups were grant application complexity, matching funding, voluntary working and obtaining C. E. and other work supports, insurance costs and corporate governance.

The key learning outcomes were that:

Project 2040 is providing vital funding for community and rural development,
Projects started small and benefitted greatly from the wide range of grants and supports available to community groups,
The corporate governance issues are now a fact of life,
The grant application process while complex must comply with Irish Government and EU accountability and
Online form applications are now more supportive for applicants.